R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 011 786 RC 000 793

PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION AND ACCULTURATION IN MULTI-ETHNIC COMMUNITIES.

BY- STEWART, OMER C.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.24 6P.

DESCRIPTORS- *ACCULTURATION, COMMUNITY ROLE, COMMUNITY, *ETHNIC GROUPS, LANGUAGE HANDICAPS, AMERICAN INDIANS, CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED, MINORITY GROUP CHILDREN, *MINORITY GROUPS, EDUCATION, ENGLISH (SECOND LANGUAGE), *EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED,

THE AUTHOR DISCUSSES THE ASSIMILATION AND EDUCATION OF ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS INTO THE DOMINANT SOCIETAL ORGANIZATION AND PATTERNS. EDUCATION IS SEEN AS A PART OF THE PROCESS OF ACCULTURATION BETWEEN PEOPLES OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS. THE AUTHOR STATES THAT ALL ETHNIC GROUPS HAVE THE SAME POTENTIAL FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT. A MAJOR DIFFICULTY ENCOUNTERED IN THE EDUCATION OF MINORITIES IS THAT THESE GROUPS ARE REQUIRED TO LEARN TWO OR THREE DIFFERENT VALUE STRUCTURES, SETS OF HABITS, AND MYTHOLOGICAL INFORMATION, WHEREAS THE DOMINANT CULTURE NEED ONLY ACQUIRE ONE SUCH FOUNDATION. FURTHER DIFFICULTIES RESULT FROM THE FACT THAT A CHILD FROM A MINORITY HAS THOROUGHLY ACQUIRED THE CULTURE OF THAT MINORITY BEFORE HE ENTERS THE FORMAL EDUCATION PROCESS OF THE DOMINANT CULTURE. AS A RESULT, THE DOMINANT CULTURE REJECTS HIM BECAUSE HE CANNOT CONFORM. THE AUTHOR LISTS THE PROBLEMS OF EDUCATION OF MINORITIES AS FOLLOWS--(1) DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE PATTERNS, (2) DISCOVERY OF SPECIAL LANGUAGE PROBLEMS, (3) DEVELOPMENT OF MINORITY COMMUNITY GUIDANCE FACILITIES, AND (4) LACK OF HELP IN UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING NATIONAL CULTURAL VALUES. (JM)

ED011786

PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION AND ACCULTURATION IN MULTI-ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

By Omer C. Stewart

Multi-ethnic communities nearly always have one group which is dominant because of one or several factors such as political and economic control, numbers, tradition and experience, etc. My remarks will be concerned with conditions in the United States where English speaking, Christian (usually Protestant) Caucasians are dominant in communities with one or more ethnic minorities, such as Negro, American Indian, Mexican, Oriental, etc. The ethnic minorities may be racial, national, or religious; or may be a combination of these and other factors.

Education is part of the acculturation which takes place when people in the United States with different ethnic backgrounds and different appearance live in the same communities. The rates of acculturation vary greatly, however, between the several different minority groups in the United States and the rate also varies between peoples of the same ethnic group who have had different experiences, usually involving separate geographic locations.

Although I wish to talk explicitly about actual or hypothetical conditions in Nevada, where Shoshone, Paiute and Washo Indians may constitute minorities in several communities, separate or with Mexicans, Spanish-Americans or Negroes, I believe that the local problems of minority education cannot be understood apart from the national problems of ority education

Whether in Nevada, California, Utah or New York, members of minority groups face special problems of education which are in some ways distinct from those of the dominant majority. The special conditions faced by a minority result in part from the cultural patterns and historic experiences of that minority and in part from culture patterns and behavior of the majority population. Thus a minority group may have developed values, attitudes and actions peculiar to that group which contribute to educational and acculturational development. On the other hand values, attitudes and actions of the majority group also greatly influence the minority reaction to education.

My emphasis has been entirely on values, attitudes and experience because I am of the opinion that innate biological hereditary differences are always individual and that innate biological traits which can serve to classify and sub-divide mankind into synthetic statistical groups called races do not influence the behavior of groups. The evidence is overwhelming that all of humanity is born with equal potential to learn everything known in the world. In every population some individuals may be born with peculiar, often unique, neural organization which allows that individual to excel at an early age in music, chess, athletics, etc. The manner of excelling will depend upon the opportunities provided by the community in which the individual is born and upon the motivations, ideals, values, skills, knowledge, etc. to which the individual is exposed. A genius born to a Washo Indian in this vicinity three hundred years ago could not possibly develop into an aerospace scientist. A child born to a Washo Indian in Reno today could be an aerospace genius or another

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

RC 000 793

Mozart or an Al Capone. Since being born an Indian can provide all of the potential for intellectual, physical or artistic greatness given anyone at birth, the question of what a Washo Indian or any other American Indian or any member of any so-called racial group finally achieves is a combination of the individual's true potential and the stimulation and opportunities provided to him. In my opinion, Indians, Whites and Negroes, in fact all mankind, being interbreeding members of one species, which is actually one race, react the same to the culture they are born into and to the knowledge and stimulation they are exposed to. Except for a few behavior patterns which the human infant shares with other primates (and with some lower mammals) such as the innate instinct to grasp and to suckle, etc., all human behavior is learned behavior. The best example is language. No one is innately equipped to speak any language. Everyone learns the language he is exposed to as a native tongue, but any normal person can learn any language as a native tongue as well as any other. Since we inherit no adult behavior, even our native speech, the manner and mode of culture is acquired by everyone alike, Indian, Negro or White, by living and learning, by reacting to stimulations, by acquiring habits and changing them.

For ethnic minorities the problems of living and learning are complicated by the fact that they are required to learn twice or three times as many ideas, habits and values as the members of the majority population. But it is not only learning more things, but often the values presented to the minority child are contradictory. Let's use language again as our example. A Shoshoni child near Elko first learns to speak the language of his grandparents because they are old and have time to tend the infant and to talk to him. The grammar of Shoshoni is complicated but the Indian child of Elko has been taught well by his grandfather before the child is six years old because the old man is blind, and because the child's mother works out. The old Shoshoni lives in a world of the past and is constantly talking to the infant. The old blind man is greatly pleased when his infant grandson at the age of one year starts to talk Shoshoni. For five years there is a constant conversation in Shoshoni between the old man and the infant, and the child is proud when he can repeat grammatically correct all of the myths and legends he has learned from his grandfather. He can recite how the demi-god, Coyote, created mankind. He can tell how Coyote and Wolf compete in football games, and hand games. He can tell how Coyote caught Cottontail and Wildcat when the latter two were juggling their eyes. Dozens of the old myths are thoroughly known and often repeated because it pleases the old man to hear Shoshoni spoken clearly and completely. No English was spoken between the old blind man and his infant guide and companion. The child never learned English at home.

In the first grade the Shoshoni child starts to hear only English and hear only stories about kings and princes and Washington and Lincoln. He starts his second language and second mythology. He starts teaching his grandfather English, but without much success because the old man really enjoys hearing the old tales told in Shoshoni. The difficulties inherent in the situation of the young Shoshoni speaking Indian from a broken home in which the infant has been reared by non-English speaking grandparents is obvious. Add to the complication the poor condition at

home for home study and the constant stimulation to continue to speak Shoshoni whenever not in school.

The best trained, most understanding and sympathetic teacher would have trouble with my little Elko Shoshoni. But the little Shoshoni kid is dirty and lousy and "snotty-nosed" so that the teacher is afraid everyone in class will get lice and catch cold. Criticism, avoidance and ostracism becomes the child's lot while trying to learn English, one of the world's most difficult tongues, and learn numbers and the history of the world.

I do not wish to belabor the example. It is not typical and yet is not impossible. All elements of the example are present in many multi-ethnic class rooms. The children of different cultures have often spent their early years learning languages, stories and attitudes different from those of the dominant culture. Such unusual cultural backgrounds could be an asset if the teachers and the communities knew how to exploit them. Where many foreign groups occur, special study programs of cultural diversity are enhanced by the personal possessions, the music and art of minority families.

To take advantage of cultural diversity and bring honor to some minority child by having the class learn his folklore and listen to his language is a teaching device only slowly spreading to rural schools. Colleges of education have been so busy preparing teachers for the regular problems of the majority of students that little or no attention has been given to the very difficult task of teaching ethnic-minorities. Only with widespread concern by educators and citizens will the solution to problems of education and acculturation of ethnic minorities be started.

Teachers and other citizens have first to accept the fact that all people are equal when they are born in their general ability to learn all of the history, art, science and literature of our civilization. By accepting the fact of equal learnability of all mankind then the peculiar problems faced by a particular group in your town may be faced. Are there any rules, regulations or practices which set one group apart from the others? The most extreme is the segregated school, but any ... segregation in housing, jobs, churches, etc., is harmful to those segregated.

Breaking the vicious cycle of poverty, poor home, poor education, excessive use of alcohol, continued proverty may have to be attacked on all levels. The community may have to motivate and help the parents to provide better homes with some books and stimulation to learn, so that children are better prepared and better motivated toward learning in school.

Students need to be given a sense of their own importance so that they can respond better to the stimulation to achieve their highest potential. Minority children are usually placed in a position of failure so that they expect to fail. Why should they try if everyone expects them to fail and no one would give them a good job even if they did get a college degree? To change such expectation of failure to confi-

dence in one's ability and drive to succeed is complicated and difficult. Children of ethnic minorities need all the stimulation and help they can get, yet they must maintain a sense of their individuality and of their personal responsibility. They must be motivated to progress under their own power. Too much help given unwisely may destroy the sense of personal worth and dim the idea of the dignity of labor with which our national culture has developed.

American Indians face the unique situation of learning how to manage their own affairs and how to obtain the privilege to do so from the Federal Government. Many Nevada Indians have escaped the unfortunate experience of living for decades on inherited wealth. Most people would consider a survival ration a dole rather than inherited wealth, but many tribes made treaties with the U. S. Government and received millions of dollars in cash and in goods rationed and doled-out to the tribes for several decades. Most tribes acquired reservations which were very restricted in use so that a great government bureau has grown and been maintained to manage the Indians estate and deprive the Indians of the experience of managing their own affairs. Indians must be motivated to do all they can for themselves and be motivated to prepare for the day they can manage their own affairs completely. The Indians must become so interested in managing themselves and their political and economic affairs they they will become sober and stay sober so they can do it well.

To summarize my views I would list the problems of education of minorities under the following headings:

1. To develop a community acceptance of the proposition that all groups of people are innately equal in their ability to learn and their ability to profit by education.

2. To discover the special language problems of children of minority peoples and develop nursery school, pre-school and kindergarten classes, to provide minority children with assistance for regular first grade classes.

3. To provide guidance and help for families of ethnic minorities so that children will have the best possible chance to achieve their potential.

4. To encourage community patterns for recognizing the value of cultural diversity so that the minorities can take pride in their ancient heritage and be honored for unusual skills.

5. To help minority groups to understand, accept and appreciate our national cultural values so that they can be motivated to work diligently and soberly to make the greatest possible contribution to American life.

Omer C. Stewart: Ph.D. University of California at Berkeley, 1939: Social Science Research Council, post-doctoral fellowship, 1940-41. Professor of Anthropology, University of Colorado, Boulder, 1950 -. Chairman Department of Anthropology. Author of many papers and articles dealing with American Indian cultures.